

[Italian Shoe Machine Worker, Beverly #6]

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WRITER Merton R. Lovett #6

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Interview

with

Roland Damiani

. . .

by

Library of Congress

Merton R. Lovett

. . .

“As well as remembered[“?”]

Interview with Roland Damiani

BY Merton R. Lovett

. . .

(from memory)

“Yes, it was a tough day, Sunday, but the church was crowded. It was Palm Sunday.

“A great many Italians attended mass. Others visited the Italian church in Salem.

“Of course some never visit any church. Their sympathies are, however, with the Catholic church. When they die or are married, they call on the priest.

“Yes, I guess it is a sure sign of spring. Most of the Italians are enthusiastic farmers. They want a garden of their own.

“Their skill is inherited, I think. In the old country everybody raised vegetables and fruit.

“I'm afraid I am an exception that proves the rule. I have no place for a garden or time to cultivate it.

“Some day, I will get a cottage in the suburbs. We'll have a garden — flowers, vegetables and grapes. My father and mother will be happy. He cannot work many more years in Boston. It will give him something to do when he retires.

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"That's right, the United Shoe Machinery Corporation supplies many garden plots free.

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"Oh, there may be one hundred. More than half of them are worked by Italians. They have no room for gardens in the tenement district. But they want to make something grow. Besides, they are frugal and hard working.

"I think so. They can make a pretty and paying garden where most men would get discouraged. It is true that they can make a bit of the dump profitable.

"The gardens are only one of many methods employed by the United Shoe to make their men happy and contented.

"The company will supply fertilizer and seeds at wholesale price.

"I suppose the merchants do object. It hurts their business.

"There is much to be said on both sides, however.

"No, it is incorrect to say that the company is in the merchandizing business. Employees can order most anything they need through the factory. The company will get it. Because of their credit and size they can purchase things at the lowest possible price.

"No, the company does not want to profit by such sales. They sell at cost plus overhead. Of course, they do not sell food or clothing, etc.

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"What can the men order through the company? Well, they can buy paint, glass and hardware supplies. Also some furniture, like furnaces and refrigerators. And of course, gasoline.

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"No, they do not deliver anything. Most all the workmen buy their gasoline at the factory. They save two cents per gallon. The company has several pumps and they are kept busy before and after work.

"How do the employees pay for their purchases? Well, the accounts are kept by a separate department. Each man's account is kept on a separate card. The amount owed is deducted from his pay envelope.

"No, every man receives credit for what he has paid and he always knows just what the balance due is.

"Of course, the company does not charge him interest. The small expense is figured in the cost.

"Well, I don't believe that the company runs a banking business.

"Yes, I know it does sometimes happen, that the company pays a man's bills. But just suppose I get deeply in debt. Perhaps I have hospital bills. Perhaps I have been reckless or careless. Sooner or later if I cannot settle, my pay is attached.

"What does the company do then? Well, if I am a good workman, they call me in for a conference. I explain to them my financial difficulties. Then if they think I am not a dead beat, they will settle the bills and deduct something from my pay check each week.

"Naturally. If a man shows himself unable to take advice. If he is often in trouble because of extravagance, then they refuse to help.

"Of course, they occasionally fire the man who is too weak to handle his finances. Especially if his character is poor or his work suffers.

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“What do I think is the total annual amount of sales by the company to its employees? I'm sure I do not know.

“Well, the merchants would naturally exaggerate. But if they lose some business, they still are fortunate. Because of the United Shoe, hundreds of Beverly families are receiving weekly pay checks.”

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